

SUMMARY – AN ACT ESTABLISHING READINESS SCHOOLS

The primary goals of this legislation are as follows: 1) turn around underperforming and chronically underperforming schools and also provide targeted support to students most in need of assistance; and 2) promote innovative in-district schools for all Massachusetts students and families. The bill achieves these goals by establishing three types of Readiness Schools, innovative in-district schools that will operate with increased autonomy and flexibility in accordance with an “innovation plan” and a performance contract.

Turning Around Underperforming and Chronically Underperforming Schools

The Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education will have the authority to convert underperforming and chronically underperforming schools to **Readiness Acceleration Schools**. The state will aggressively remedy conditions of persistent underperformance by 1) modifying existing district and union rules, 2) offering additional curricular and instructional tools, and 3) providing additional supports such as wrap-around health and human services and additional learning time.

For each Readiness Acceleration School, the Commissioner will work in collaboration with the district superintendent, the chair of the school committee, the president of the local teacher’s union, administrators, teachers, parents, and representatives from health and human services agencies to develop an innovation plan and a performance contract.

The innovation plan must include two or more of the following components:

- Steps to address social service and health needs of students at the school and their families;
- Steps to improve child welfare and law enforcement services in the school community;
- Improvements to workforce development services offered to students and families;
- Additional job-embedded professional development for teachers and administrators; and
- Increased opportunities for teacher planning time and collaboration.

The Commissioner will also have the authority to include one or more of the following components in the innovation plan:

- Changes to the school’s curriculum;
- Reallocation of the existing school budget;
- Allocation of additional district funds to match the average per pupil funding level of similar schools in the district;
- Salary increases to attract highly qualified principal or teacher candidates;
- Expansion of the school day or school year;
- Limitation or suspension of selected contract and collective bargaining agreement provisions to accelerate improvement;
- Reapplication by teachers and principals for their position at the school; and
- Limitation or suspension of selected school district policies as necessary.

The Commissioner will submit a draft innovation plan to the key stakeholders and incorporate any modifications that would further promote students' academic achievement or the rapid improvement of the school. If necessary, a superintendent, school committee, or local teacher union can appeal to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education regarding one or more components of the innovation plan.

For underperforming schools, in most cases the district superintendent will be responsible for implementing the innovation plan and meeting the terms of the performance contract. For chronically underperforming schools, the Commissioner will designate an external receiver (a non-profit entity with demonstrated success in improving schools and increasing student achievement) that will be responsible for implementing the innovation plan and meeting the terms of the performance contract.

The Commissioner will evaluate each Readiness Acceleration School annually to assess the implementation of its innovation plan and determine whether the school has met the goals of its performance contract. Based on this evaluation, the Commissioner may amend or renew the performance contract, transfer the operation of the school from the superintendent to an external receiver, or terminate the performance contract with an external receiver.

Turning Around Chronically Underperforming School Districts

If the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education designates a school district as chronically underperforming, the Board will select an external receiver (a non-profit entity with a demonstrated record of success in improving low-performing schools and increasing student achievement) to operate the district.

As with the Readiness Acceleration Schools, the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education and the external receiver will work in consultation with the district superintendent, the chair of the school committee, the president of the local teacher's union, teachers, administrators, parents, and representatives from health and human services agencies to develop an innovation plan and a performance contract.

The innovation plan for a chronically underperforming district must include wrap-around health and human services for students and families and professional development opportunities for teachers and school leaders. The innovation plan will also allow for greater autonomy and flexibility in the areas of curriculum, budget, school schedules, staffing (including selected waivers or exemptions from teacher contract provisions as necessary to accelerate improvement), and district policies.

The Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education will evaluate the performance of the external receiver annually to assess the implementation of the innovation plan and adherence to the terms of the performance contract. Based on this evaluation, the Commissioner may amend or renew the performance contract or terminate the performance contract with an external receiver.

Promoting Innovative In-District Schools for All Massachusetts Students and Families

The Readiness Schools bill establishes two types of innovative in-district public schools that:

- Feature high degrees of flexibility and autonomy in the areas of curriculum, budget, school schedule and calendar, staffing (including voluntary exemptions or waivers from teacher contract provisions) and school district policies;
- Promote high levels of student achievement through the use of a performance contract;
- Foster innovation by allowing parents, teachers, school and district administrators, school committees, universities, museums, non-profit organizations, and other groups to submit proposals to establish Readiness Schools;
- Allow educators to fundamentally transform classroom instruction.

Readiness Advantage Schools and **Readiness Alliance Schools** can be established as new schools or as conversions of existing schools. These schools will operate under the terms of a performance contract and an innovation plan approved by the local school committee, which details the areas of autonomy and flexibility the school will feature.

- In **Readiness Advantage Schools**, faculty and school administrators will be primarily responsible for developing and meeting the terms of the school's performance contract and innovation plan.
- **Readiness Alliance Schools** will feature comprehensive partnerships with external partners such as universities, museums, or charter school operators, and these external partners will play a central role in managing the school. In these schools, the external partner will be primarily responsible for developing and meeting the terms of the school's performance contract and innovation plan.

Readiness Advantage and Readiness Alliance Schools will be established in an inclusive, locally-based process:

- The eligible applicant develops a detailed prospectus outlining the plan for the school.
- A screening committee consisting of the superintendent, a school committee member and a teacher selected by the applicable union conducts an initial review of the prospectus and decides, on the basis of a two-thirds vote, whether to accept, reject, or return the prospectus to the applicant for revisions.
- If the prospectus is approved, the applicant forms a committee of key stakeholders, including district and school administrators, teachers, and parents, to develop the school's innovation plan.

- Next, the committee develops the performance contract for which the Readiness School will be held accountable.
- To convert an existing school, the applicant presents the innovation plan and performance contract to the teachers for approval, subject to a majority vote. If approved by the teachers, the innovation plan and performance contract is then presented to the school committee for final approval by a majority vote. New school applicants present the plan and contract directly to the school committee for final approval.
- Each Readiness School will be authorized for a period of up to five years.

Each Readiness Advantage or Readiness Alliance School will be evaluated annually by the local superintendent, who will present the results of the evaluation to the school committee.

The school committee may, on the advice of the superintendent, amend the performance contract, limit or suspend the innovation plan, or terminate the authorization of the school.

At the end of the five-year authorization period, school leaders will convene a group of stakeholders including administrators, teachers, parents, and external partners to update the innovation plan and performance contract as necessary. The leaders may then petition the school committee to extend the authorization for up to another five years, and majority approval by school committee members is required to re-authorize the school.

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